DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 075 872 CS 500 240

AUTHOR	Golden, James L.
TITLE	Cicero and Quintilian on the Formation of an Orator.
INSTITUTION	Southern Connecticut State Coll., New Haven. Dept. of Speech.
PUB DATE	69
NOTE	6p.
JOURNAL CIT	Speech Journal; n6 p29-34 1969
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Communication (Thought Transfer); *Composition Skills (Literary); *Discourse Analysis; Information Theory; Literary Analysis; *Persuasive Discourse; Public Speaking; *Rhetoric; *Rhetorical Criticism; Textual Criticism
IDENTIFIERS	Cicero; Quintilian

ABSTRACT

The contributions of Cicero and Quintilian, the two leading Roman rhetoricians, were based on their acceptance of the prior philosophical theories of Isocrates, which emphasized a cultural approach to rhetoric. Cicero and Quintilian, drawing from Isocrates, sought prospective orators who had a natural talent for eloquence and who could adopt a cultural approach to rhetoric that emphasized the worth of reading and writing as important to forming the abilities of the model speaker. Their particular contributions were their emphases on the relationships between writing and speaking ability and their construction of systems of rhetoric which viewed the orator as the prime motivator of a group of listeners on a specific occasion. Their writer-speaker centered rhetoric anticipated the tradition of rhetoric and letters that flourished in later centuries, with special relevance for mid-twentieth century students of communication theory. (Author/RN)

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Speech Journal, n6, 1969
Published by Dept. of Speech,
Southern Connecticut State College.

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cicero and quintilian on the formation of an orator

by James L. Golden

The theory of culture approach to rhetoric has long been identified with the name of Isocrates. For decades in his highly successful school which attracted potential orators, historians, and political leaders, he taught that rhetoric "ought to be a work of art as complete and as substantive as the utterance of poety . . ."[1] In doing so he demonstrated faith in prose rhythm as a literary form and recommended its use as a means of preparing the student of communication to take part in political affairs.

Isocrates, who described his system as philosophical, built his concept of oratory around four major characteristics. To be effective, he argued, a speaker or writer must have a broad view of nature and society; he must root his ideas in an elevated moral tone; he must adhere to a thorough and well structured method of practice and scholarship; and he should strive to create works that would have permanent rather than ephemeral value.[2] The communicator who hoped to achieve these ends would, of necessity, have a firm grasp of the humanities and social sciences, project a strong moral dimension, and reveal a commitment to scholarship. He would, in short, have an appreciation for culture.

This cultural and pragmatic emphasis in rhetorical instruction held a special appeal for Cicero and Quintilian. "The brilliancy of Isocrates" which, observes Jebb, came "to Cicero through the school of Rhodes" contributed significantly to the development of Cicero's rhetorical theory and practice;[3] and this, in turn, helped shape the philosophy of Quintilian. With Isocrates the two leading Roman rhetoricians saw the relationship of art, nature, reading, and practice in producing the orator. To sketch this correlation and to show some of its implications is the burden of this essay.

An important first step in understanding Cicero's method of forming an orator is to note his interest in constructing a philosophy of scholarship which could serve as a framework for producing rhetorical works that have artistic form. In his *Tusculan Disputations*, written a few weeks before the Ides of March in 44 B.C., Cicero observed that an author who publishes his thoughts expressed in faulty content, arrangement, and style is guilty of "an unpardonable abuse of letters and retirement."[4] A few months later, following the murder of Caesar, Cicero sought to protect the scholarly reputation as well as the physical safety of his friend Brutus. In a letter to Atticus he noted: "Brutus has sent me his speech that he delivered before the Assembly on the Capitol. He wants me to correct it frankly before he publishes it." Cicero then added: "I should like to read the speech . . . and to let me know what you think of it."[5] The interest which both Brutus and Cicero expressed on this occasion concerning the need for careful scrutiny of speeches designed to be published doubtless epitomizes the prevailing fear which gripped the real and suspected opponents of Caesar. But more importantly it reveals the high status of Latin scholarship during the generation of Cicero and the immediately subsequent Augustan Age. As a man of letters who was, according to Chester Starr, "the most important single cultural leader in the thousand years of Roman development,"[6] Cicero conducted a lifelong campaign to create a philosophical vocabulary in Latin and to establish standards for a concise, varied, vivid, and informal style which would appeal to the literati. But he also set for himself the task of enriching his native tongue so that it could become suitable as a spoken language.[7] His conscious attempt to mobilize the Latin language led Cicero to write numerous letters, essays, dialogues, poems, and speeches that were filed for publication. Moreover it prompted him to see strong similarities between a speaker's devotion to careful scholarship and his ability to express ideas orally and in writing.

CS 500 240

This Isocratic tendency to view rhetoric and other prose forms as an artistic production which should win the approval of men of culture not only influenced Cicero's *De Oratore* but constitutes a major thrust in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*. But the ideal orator both men sought to create must meet three additional requirements. He should have an inherent ability to speak, a comprehensive reading knowledge of philosophy and other liberal arts, and intense practice in writing. So closely related are these forms of communication, Quintilian held, that if one were separated the others would lose their power. He observed in his *Institutio Oratoria*:

> They are so intimately and inseparably connected, that if any one of them be neglected, we shall but waste the labor which we have devoted to the others. For eloquence will never attain to its full development or robust health, unless it acquires strength by frequent practice in writing, while such practice without the models supplied by reading will be like a ship drifting aimlessly without a steersman. Again, he who knows what he ought to say and how he should say it, will be like a miser brooding over his hoarded treasure, unless he has the weapons of his eloquence ready for battle and prepared to deal with every emergency.[8]

Largely because of the high standards inherent in a cultural view of rhetoric, Cicero and Quintilian, like their Greek predecessors, concluded that nature was a more influential force than nurture in shaping an orator. For it is nature which gives to the speaker his inventive ability, his talent to arrange and adapt arguments in a judicious manner, his potential power in language control, and his basic vocal and physical mechanism. Without these innate essentials one cannot appreciate the role of culture in rhetoric, nor can he develop a facility in the arts of reading and writing which form the essence of oratory.

But if nature is needed to provide the raw materials for effective rhetorical performance it is nurture that takes the materials and moulds them into a meaningful pattern. One of the fruits of nurture is to open the doors of knowledge through a thorough and steady program of reading and study. "No man can be an orator complete in all points of merit," said Cicero, "who has not attained a knowledge of all important subjects and arts. For it is from knowledge that oratory must derive its beauty and fullness, and unless there is such knowledge, well-grasped and comprehended by the speaker, there must be something empty and almost childish in the utterance."[9] As the search for the perfect orator unfolds in the subsequent pages of *De Oratore*, Cicero strives mightily to show that learning and eloquence must go together.

In formulating a pragmatic educational view of rhetoric based on a theory of culture which stressed the value of nature and knowledge, Cicero and Quintilian, standing squarely in the tradition of Isocrates, said little that was new. As they turned to the function and importance of writing as a tool for developing an orator they were refreshingly innovative and influential. In the early stages of an orator's preparation, Quintilian held that an endowed speaking talent is first in importance, while reading ranks second. As the student of rhetoric progresses, however, the relative value of these points will shift. With the maturing of the educational process, writing assumes a steadily significant role. In his *De Oratore* and *Brutus*, Cicero asserted that writing is not only an "eminent . . . teacher of eloquence,"[10] but the most impressive single influence on speaking practices.[11]

Cicero and Quintilian were not content to give testimonials concerning the general value of writing in relation to speech. They proceeded to examine the specific contribution of the pen as an implement of oratory. This was especially evident in the area of extemporaneous speech. Some Roman speakers frequently wrote out their addresses in complete manuscript form, then committed the language to memory. But they attempted to deliver the oration in such an off-hand manner that even the judge could not detect the amount of labor which went into the construction of the work. Such a practice, however, failed to fortify the speaker against unpredictable emergencies. Moreover, particularly in forensic speaking, it was often too time consuming to be useful. Cicero and other successful pleaders before the bar, therefore, usually wrote certain portions of their orations, such as the introduction, conclusion, and select passages in the discus-

sion. The effectiveness of the speech, then, depended largely upon their ability to improvise.

Through his experiences as a performer and an observer of forensic opponents, Cicero also had come to believe that whenever a person can express unpremeditated thoughts in a style that resembles what is written, he may be considered a master of extempore speech. That the means of gaining this facility is through diligent practice in writing is also clear. As Cicero put it in *De Oratore:*

> . . . he too who approaches oratory by way of long practice in writing, brings this advantage to his task, that even if he is extemporizing, whatever he may say bears a likeness to the written word; and moreover if ever, during a speech, he has introduced a written note, the rest of his discourse, when he turns away from the writing, will proceed in unchanging style. Just as when a boat is moving at high speed, if the crew rest upon their oars, the craft herself still keeps her way and her run, though the driving force of the oars has ceased, so in an unbroken discourse, when written notes are exhausted, the rest of the speech still maintains a like progress, under the impulse given by the similarity and energy of the written word.[12]

Quintilian echoed a similar sentiment when he said:

> For without the consciousness of such preliminary study our powers of speaking extempore will give us nothing but an empty flow of words, springing from the lips and not from the brain. It is in writing that the eloquence has its roots and foundations, it is writing that provides the holy of holies where the wealth of oratory is stored, and whence it is produced to meet the demands of sudden emergencies.[13]

If writing skill contributes significantly to one's extemporaneous speaking style, it is also useful as a means of measuring the validity of an orator's reputation and long range effectiveness. In fulfilling this challenge of rhetorical criticism, Cicero and Quintilian classified Greek and Roman orators into three categories: (1) persuasive speakers who wrote little or ineffectively; (2) good writers who spoke rarely or inadequately; and (3) scholarly writers who spoke well.

Hortensius, Sulpicius, Galba, and Pericles were articulate speakers, yet they either lacked the ability to write or the will to do so. Hortensius, a contemporary of Cicero, early in his career mastered the Asiatic style, and developed a dynamic delivery. As he cultivated these talents, he became one of the leading orators of Rome. Indeed his prestige remained unchallenged until Cicero's eloquence reached maturity. Notwithstanding his success as a speaker, Hortensius was a deficient writer. "His writings," said Quintilian, "fall so far short of the reputation which for so long secured him the first place among orators."[14]

Sulpicius likewise was an effective speaker who had an elevated and flowing style, a vibrant and resonant voice, and a graceful and theatrical manner. Yet he failed to achieve permanent distinction as an orator, for, as Cicero regretfully observed: "No oration from the mind of Sulpicius . . . is extant. I often heard him comment on the fact that he had never cultivated the habit of writing and found it impossible."[15]

That Pericles was similarly a persuasive speaker, Socrates, Plato, and Cicero concurred. For forty years the Athenians applauded his eloquence. But when Quintilian examined Pericles' written works, he concluded that some other pen had composed them. "I have been unable to discover anything," he said, "in the least worthy of his great reputation for eloquence, and am consequently the less surprised that there should be some who hold that he never committed anything to writing and that the writings circulating under his name are the works of others."[16]

Cicero, when asked by Brutus to explain how Galba's reputed speaking effectiveness was not apparent in his printed works, suggested three reasons why certain orators did not write as well as they spoke or did not write at all. Since it was often customary, first of all, to write out speeches after they had been delivered, the orators, when writing, were in a different physical environment and psychological mood. The inspiration which they had received from the cheering multitudes in the forum was not present in their private studies at home. Hence they no longer had the urge to call forth the necessary energy that is needed to write with vividness and force. Under such circumstances the written composition

doubtless was inferior to the spoken word. Secondly, since some orators were primarily concerned with their immediate audience they had no compulsion to influence posterity. Others, finally, refrained from writing, as we have seen, because they recognized their natural deficiency or inadequate training.[17]

If Cicero and Quintilian were disappointed in orators who lacked training or talent in writing, they also criticized writers who could not or did not communicate ideas orally. The two leading members of this group were Isocrates and Lysias. Although Cicero called Lysias an almost perfect orator, and described Isocrates as a "consummate orator" and "an ideal teacher," he deplored the tendency of these speakers to shrink "from the broad daylight of the forum."[18] Implicit in Cicero's description of Isocrates and Lysias was an indictment of logographers who observed rather than experienced the rhetorical strategy they had created. Despite his enormous talents Isocrates could not be included "in the class of perfection," noted by Cicero in his *De Optimo Genere Oratorum*. "For his oratory does not take part in the battle nor use steel, but plays with a wooden sword . . ."[19]

The ideal orator sought by Cicero and Quintilian would most likely be found in the third category of communicators who achieved excellence both in writing and speaking. Not the least of those who approximated this high standard of eloquence were Aeschines, Demosthenes, and Cicero himself. The following statement drawn from the *Brutus* stands as testimony of Demosthenes' accomplishments: "For the perfect orator and the one who lacks absolutely nothing you would without hesitation name Demosthenes. Ingenuity however acute, however subtle, however shrewd, would fail to discover any point in the orations from his hand which he has overlooked."[20] In other rhetorical works Cicero was less laudatory, arguing that his Greek predecessor fell short of perfection, but he never altered his judgment that Demostheness was unsurpassed in the history of oratory. It remained for Quintilian in Book X of *Institutio Oratoria* to establish the precedent of drawing a comparison between Demosthenes and Cicero. These two orators, Quintilian held, had two important points in common. They knew how to write as well as how to speak. A close analysis of their published speeches demonstrates that the touch of the hand was equal to the power of the voice. In short, they did what all good orators should do. They wrote as they spoke and spoke as they wrote. Such, observed Quintilian, is the essence of oratory.[21]

Once they had become convinced of the interrelationship between writing and speaking Cicero and Quintilian, as proponents of the philosophical educational view of rhetoric, established guidelines for gaining facility in writing manuscripts that contain "the best thoughts in the choicest language."[22] Quintilian began his discussion of this theme by exhorting his students to avoid spending excessive time on the first draft. But he also warned them not to compose too rapidly. Thirdly he criticized the common procedure of dictating speeches to an amanuensis. To these prescriptive statements emphasizing what should not be done, he next presented positive suggestions for improvement. One should know when, where, and how fast to write; and he should, when necessary, employ the three methods of revision—"addition, excision, and alteration."[23]

Of the possible exercises that may be used to help develop writing skill the most important are imitation, translation, and paraphrasing. Whenever these practices are combined they stimulate the memory, increase the understanding, and enhance the flexibility and ease of expression. Hopefully what is learned from these exercises will tend to produce an eloquence which is similarly effective in the written and spoken word. The value of this approach is described in the following passages taken from Cicero's *De Optimo Genere Oratorum*:

> I translated the most famous orations of the two most eloquent Attic orators, Aeschines and Demosthenes, orations which they delivered against each other. And I did not translate them as an interpreter, but as an orator, keeping the same ideas and the forms, or as one might say, the "figures" of thought(but in language which conforms to our usage. And in so doing, I did not hold it necessary to render word for word, but I preserved the general style and force of the language. . . . The result of my labour will be that our Romans will know what to demand from

those who claim to be the atticists and to what rule of speceh, as it were, they are to be held.[24]

Cicero also found it rewarding to translate and paraphrase the works of enephon and Plato.[25]

It would appear from this brief survey that the two leading Roman rhetoricians wanted prospective orators who had a natural talent for eloquence to embrace a theory of culture approach to rhetorical performance which emphasized the worth of reading and writing as important elements in forming the model speaker. Notwithstanding the fact that this philosophy was derived largely from Isocrates, Cicero and Quintilian are to be commended for their creative suggestions concerning the relationship between writing and speaking ability. The practitioner who stresses one of these communication forms and neglects the other may achieve temporary fame as a persuasive speaker or an enduring influence as an accomplished manuscript writer. But he can never approximate the ideal orator who must excel in both areas. The implications of this analysis are not without significance. First, in arguing that a facility in writing is needed to produce the necessary momentum for an extemporaneous speaker to address his immediate audience with rhythmical smoothness and force, Cicero and Quintilian, conscious of the importance of effect, constructed a practical system of rhetoric which viewed the orator as the prime motivator of a group of listeners on a specific occasion.

Oratory, however, must have a larger goal than to stimulate a listener in a particular situation at a designated moment in history. It should also address itself to a long range audience not bound by time and locale. In a sense, therefore, Cicero and Quintilian were not only rhetorical critics but literary critics as well. It is instructive at this point to recall Wichelns' classic treatise, "The Literary Criticism of Oratory." The literary critic, he observed, views a "work as the voice of the human spirit addressing itself to men of all ages and times. . . ."[26] This tradition of criticism which Wichelns found prevalent in the nineteenth century received an early impetus in the writings of Cicero and Quintilian. Convinced that long range effectiveness, as well as immediate impact, is an essential measurement of rhetorical success, they wished to elevate oratory to the level of literature. This prompted them to give a preeminent position not only to invention but to style which, in turn, made them wary of publishing manuscripts that had not been polished and honed to meet the taste of an educated populace. For this reason they alluded with approval to the great confrontation between Aeschines and Demosthenes in 338 B.C. as an example which both instructed and inspired the Romans of the first century B.C. and A.D. not merely because of the historic message and the renowned protagonists but because of the elegant and sublime style that gave the extant manuscripts permanence. In fashioning his own eloquence Cicero quite clearly kept one eye on his immediate audience and another on posterity. Thus he, like Demosthenes, provided models which could be imitated, translated, and paraphrased during subsequent centuries. Perhaps the author of *Ad Herennium* had the youthful Cicero in mind when he said: "Let orators devote their artistic power to this purpose—to win esteem as worthy themselves to be chosen as models by others, rather than as good choosers of others who could serve as models for them."[27]

Not to be overlooked is another influence derived from a writing-speaking centered rhetoric conceived by Isocrates and perpetuated by Cicero and Quintilian. In giving similar emphasis to the need for instructing students in the two forms of communication and in describing the effect each has upon the other, they, despite their attachment to an oral society which moulded them, anticipated the tradition of rhetoric and belles lettres that flourished in the eighteenth century. Adam Smith in his popular lectures in Edinburgh and later in his classroom discussions at the University of Glasgow, and Hugh Blair in his celebrated book in 1783 combined rhetoric with polite literature and criticism as a basis for teaching their students to develop proficiency in oral and written communication.

Similarly Post-World War II courses combining units on reading, writing, speaking, and listening are at least indirectly traceable to Cicero and Quintilian. In maintaining, therefore, an abiding concern for cre-

ating an ideal orator who could produce works of immediate and permanent value, the Roman rhetoricians pointed the way toward a rhetoric of relevance for mid-twentieth century students of communication theory.[28]

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3. *Ibid.*, 73.
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5. Cicero to Atticus, Sinuessa, May 18, 44 B.C., in Moses Hadas, ed., *The Basic Works of Cicero* (New York, 1951), pp. 418-19.
6. Chester Starr, *A History of the Ancient World* (New York, 1965), p. 526.
7. See H. M. Hubbell, tr., *Orator* (Cambridge, Mass., 1942), p. 298; Hadas, *The Basic Works of Cicero*, x, xvii; H. J. Haskell, *This Was Cicero* (New York, 1942), p. 301; and Charles Baldwin, *Ancient Rhetoric and Poetic* (Gloucester, Mass., 1959), p. 39.
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9. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham, tr., *Cicero De Oratore* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), Book I. vi. 20.
10. *Ibid.*, I. 33. 150.
11. G. L. Hendrickson, tr., *Brutus* (Cambridge, Mass., 1942), xxiii. 92. Cited hereafter as *Brutus*.
12. *De Oratore*, I. 33. 152-53.
13. *I.O.*, Book X. 3. 2-3.
14. *Ibid.*, XI. 3. 8.
15. *Brutus*, lvi. 205.
16. *I.O.*, III. 1. 12.
17. *Brutus*, 23. 91-95.
18. H. M. Hubbell, tr., *Cicero De Optimo Genere Oratorum* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), V. 17. Cited hereafter as *De Optimo Genere Oratorum*. Also see *Brutus*, viii. 32 and 35.
19. *De Optimo Genere Oratorum*, v. 17.
20. *Brutus*, viii. 35.
21. *I. O.*, Book X. 7. 7.
22. *Orator*, lxvii. 227.
23. *I. O.*, Book X. 3 and 4.
24. *De Optimo Genere Oratorum*, v. 14-15.
25. Cicero was particularly impressed with Plato's ability to communicate. In his essay "On Moral Duties," he observed: "I indulge the fancy that Plato, had he chosen to practise oratory, would have made an impressive and eloquent pleader. . . ." *The Basic Works of Cicero*, p. 6. He reinforces this idea in *De Oratore*. Here he suggests that after reading the *Gorgias* "what impressed me most deeply about Plato in that book was, that it was when making fun of orators that he himself seemed to me the consummate orator." *De Oratore*, I. xi. 47.
26. Herbert Wichelns, "The Literary Criticism of Oratory," in *Studies in Rhetoric and Public Speaking in Honor of James Albert Winans* (New York, 1925), p. 213.
27. H. Caplan, tr., *Ad Herennium* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), iv. 7.
28. They would have endorsed enthusiastically the strategy of John F. Kennedy who confessed that he prepared his inaugural address with the thought in mind that it would achieve a high place in United States history. See *New York Times*, January 13, 1961.